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Digital Humanities Results Report

Gregory Iannarella
gregory.iannarella@shu.edu

Digital Humanities Seed Grant Final Report

"Social Justice Landscapes and Recursive Research"

Implementation of Digital Humanities in Seton Hall's FYW Program

Greg Iannarella

INITIAL PROPOSAL

To develop a syllabus that incorporates digital humanities theory and practice in the instruction of Seton Hall's First Year Writing Courses, specifically through the theme of Race and Social Justice. The pilot courses will focus on teaching students to create and view their own "Language Landscapes" in the hopes of developing new and innovative ways to teach how language concerning social justice operates and evolves over time and through space. Language Landscapes will be visual representations of large changes, shifts or evolutions of language made possible by the powerful analytics tools that technology offers us. The courses will explore questions of digital literacy. They will allow students to consider themselves as digital citizens, asking that they visualize their source work to view a macro-context of their inquiry that will complement, not replace, close reading and traditional source use. Students will produce a portfolio of visual narrative projects concerning the language of oppression and social justice. The ultimate goal is for these projects to be collected and displayed in an online environment that will showcase multiple semesters worth of student generated digital humanities work.

Through this project, I will continue developing innovative ways to teach race discourse in my courses. I will also gain insight into the larger questions and practice of digital humanities that I can share with my colleagues who can use the same techniques in their own courses,

regardless of theme. I plan to use this opportunity to collect specific data and experience concerning how digital tools can change our instruction of the humanities.

To complete this project, I plan to use Tableau, Excel, Policy Map, R, Cornell's Freedom on the Move Database, and HathiTrust.

With the exception of R, these tools will be used in class to teach digital humanities research skills. I'm particularly interesting in HathiTrust and Policy map, which will allow students to layer different word trends and instantly view a visualization of data that could help them identify a larger thesis about where and when certain language may correlate to oppression or social change. By the end of the course, students will have some familiarity with how to clean, manage, and extract information from a larger corpus of text using these tools, most of which are already made freely available to them by Seton Hall.

This summer, I will develop a syllabus and specific lesson plans that incorporate digital humanities tools into the instruction of these courses. To be effective, the digital humanities theory and practice must be reinforced and balanced by traditional writing instruction. The courses will be delicately constructed so as not to overshadow our core competencies, but to show that the traditional skills we teach will not be replaced by technology, but enhanced by it. During the fall semester, I will execute the lesson plans, gathering student work, and assessing it. I hope to present these findings at First Year Writing Faculty Development. I hope to enter into conversation with other faculty members about how digital literacy might become a crucial component of our instruction of rhetorical strategy and research.

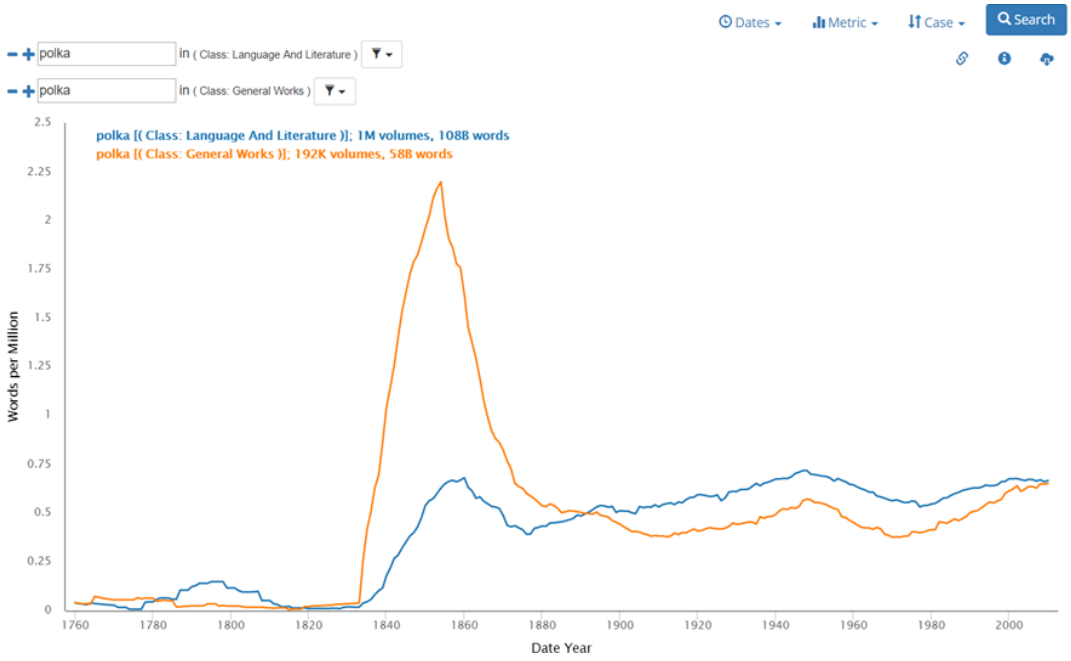
Outcomes and Results

As I carried out this project in the fall, the outcomes evolved to meet some of the needs of our First Year Writing Department. Mainly, a large concern for our professors is how to teach

recursive writing to our students. That is, how do we show them the often mysterious process of writing, encountering new information, doubling back, and revising based on what has been *found*. Many students write linearly. Their research is linear and their critical thinking and writing suffer because of it.

I saw a unique opportunity to use these digital tools to simulate and force students to engage in recursive writing and research. My new goal was to promote recursive research and writing based on the discovery and evolution of research questions using a digital tool that could help illustrate inequalities geographically. I hoped to accomplish this by allowing students to explore this data in a 'sandbox,' where they might play, explore, and most importantly, feel constraints.

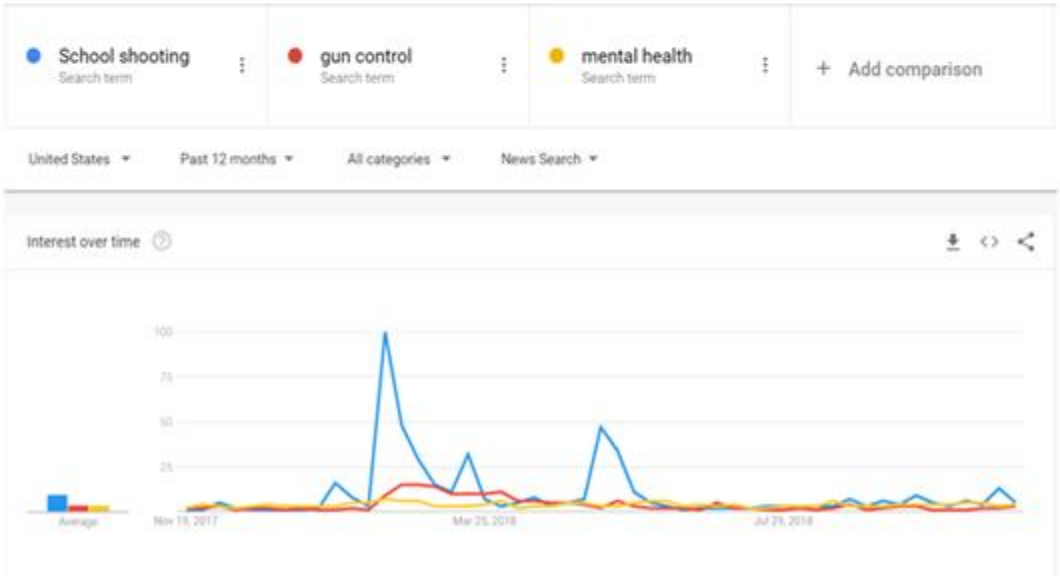
POSSIBLE TOOLS FOR PROJECT

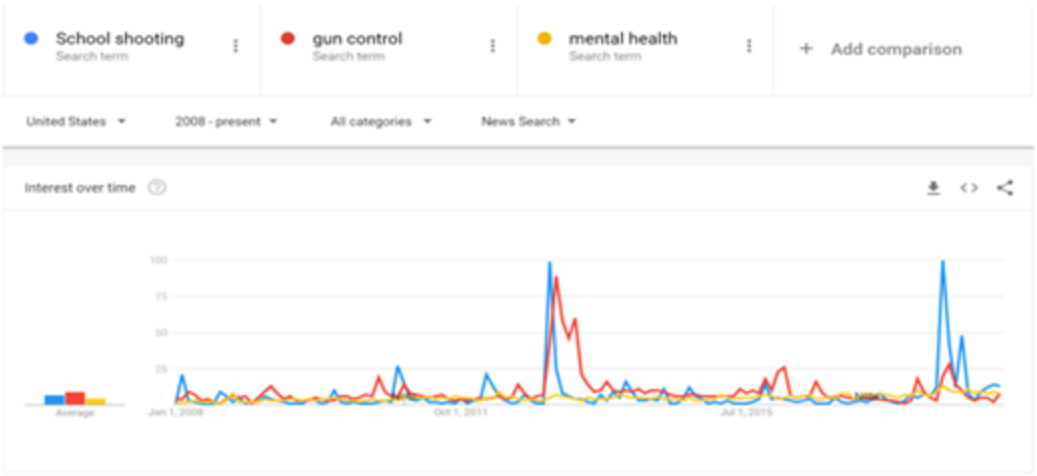


Pictured above, HathiTrust analytics tool combs their database for statistics concerning language use over time. The 1850's was a big decade for Polka!

A student tracked these linguistic trends for more pressing matters such as the frequency of language surrounding mass shootings as seen below.

> marginalized in some way. As said by Best "This is how contemporary Americans create new social problems Typically, the process involves a three-part recipe: 1) Illustrate the problem with an awful example (e.g., the mass murder at Columbine High School).2) Give the problem a name ("school shootings"). 3) Use statistics to suggest the problem's size and importance" ~~(Best)~~. These steps make the school shooting situation seem as if it is a tool used to further progress the discussion of certain political issues over actual reporting and if that idea is true, then the media is profiting highly off of reporting these crimes.

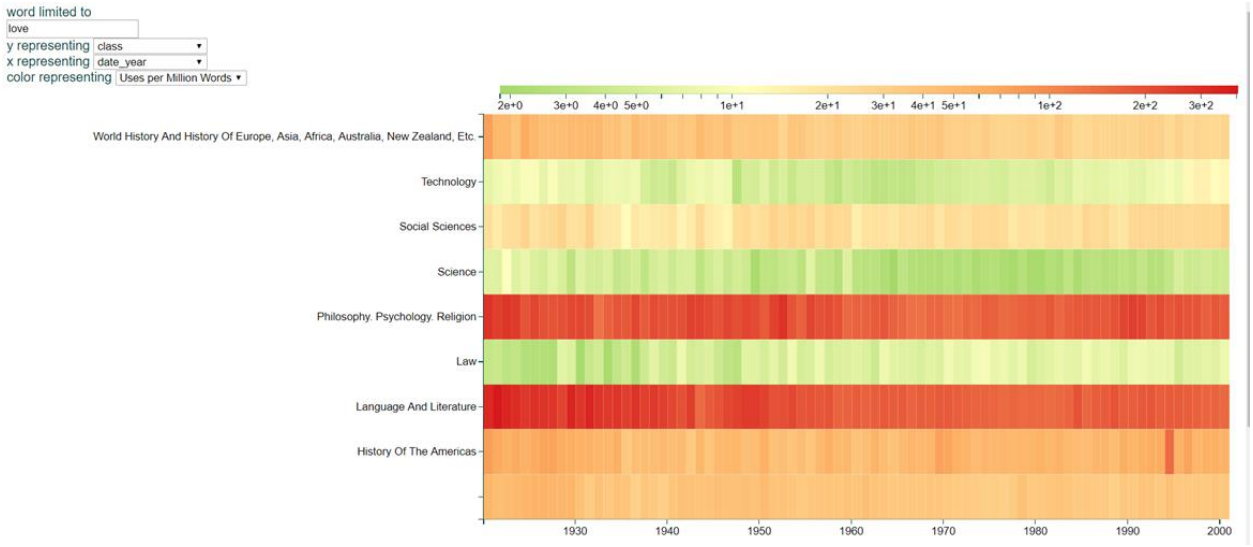


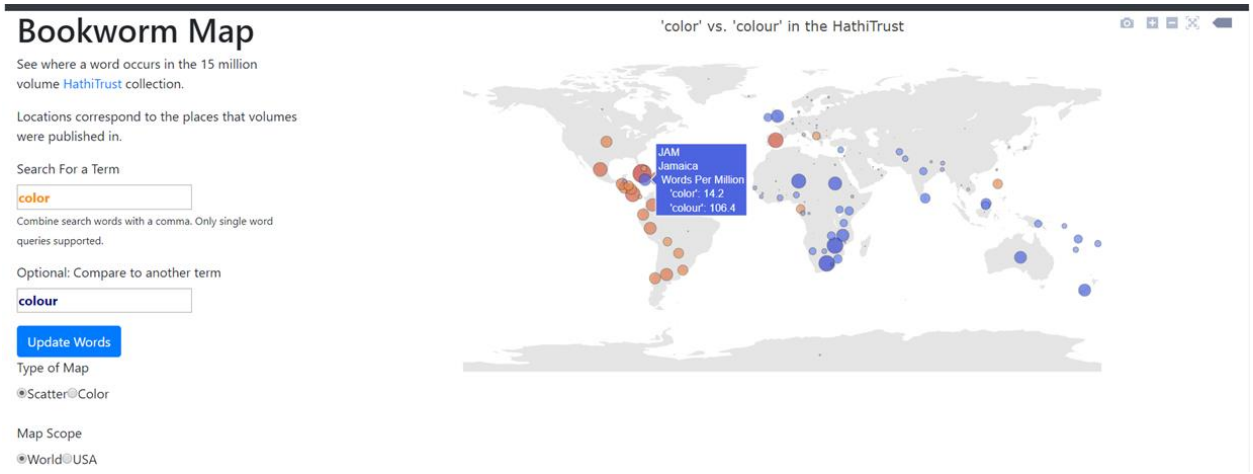


These two graphs display the information over different time periods, with the bottom graph going back ten years, and the top graph covering the year of 2018. Both of these blue line trend graphs are focused on the searches of google consumers when using the keyword "school shootings" in the news section tab of google. The peaks in data correlate with when the shootings happened, and the two largest spikes in data on the lower graph are the most talked about school shootings in recent memory, the Sandy Hook shooting of 2012, and the Parkland shooting of 2018. The red and yellow lines are shown as common topics that usually follow a discourse after a school shooting. The relatively low results for mental health show that even if some mental illness is to cause a school shooting it will always be less discussed/ looked up than the actual event itself.

The student displays the same problematic writing tendencies that all of our young writers. But what's changed is a massive improvement in the implementation of information taken from their research which had a profound impact on their working idea.

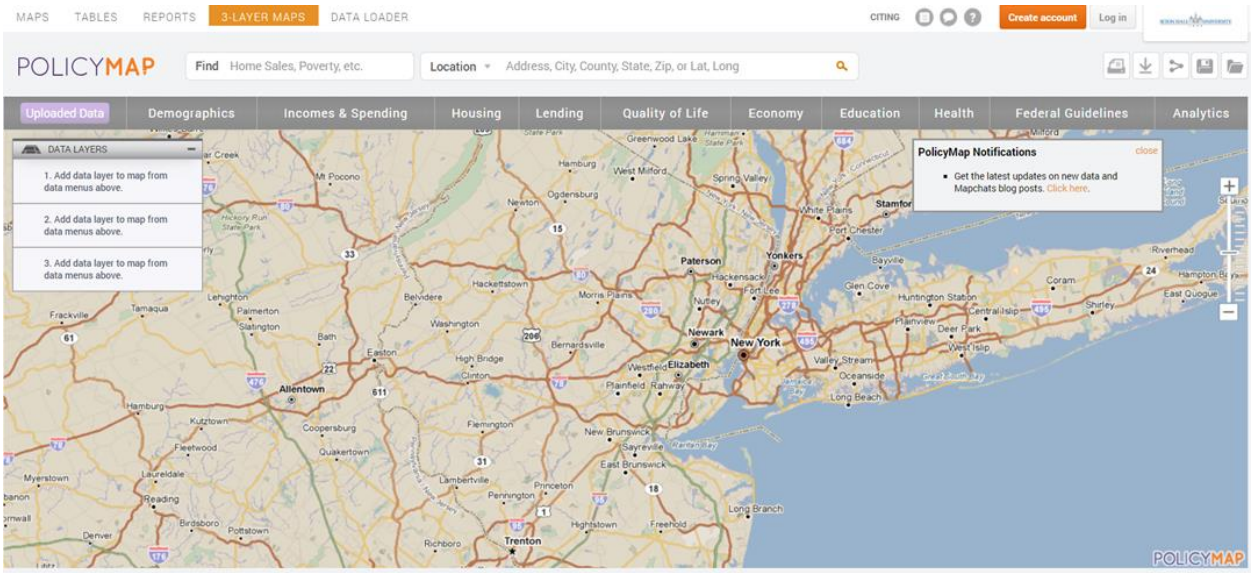
Other Tool Examples





HathiTrust has heat maps and geographical, interactive mapping tools. Showing these tools side by side can help students understand the different ways data lives, and how those intersecting lives might lead to different opportunities for analysis. The heat map tracks how popular specific language is by discourse over time (legal, scientific, etc) while the map tracks quantity based on geography of publication.

THIS PROJECTS "SANDBOX" OF CHOICE



Policy Map is an interactive tool provided through the Seton Hall library. Users can stack up to three pieces of census information. For example, you can stack median income, price of home and environmental issues to quickly see if there is a broad relationship between economic class and proximity to environmental problems. Students use this tool to complete their Persuasive assignment.

PERSUASIVE ASSIGNMENT

Where students create their own visualization as part of a recursive research process

Persuasive Essay

Length: 5 pages

Must have Works Cited page

Assignment number #1:

•Familiarizing yourself to the issue: for this part of the essay, you should be solely finding sources and information. Then, write a few paragraphs where you put these sources into conversation with one another. Give your reader some idea of the issue, the opposing sides, and their complexities. Think about the *They Say, I Say* technique. Show us the nuances of the issue.

•Use Policy Map to explore your topic, set parameters, and play with how your topic exists geographically.

•#2: Develop your own argument. Weigh the pros and cons of each side and then choose which side you wish to support. Pretend you're writing to the President, what are you going to say to him? What techniques will you use to persuade him one way or another (ethos, pathos, logos.) During this phase, you should develop a thesis statement.

•#3: Rough draft. Pull together all of the parts and deliver a well-organized, informative, persuasive analysis of the issue.

•##Choosing your issue: it must be something specific. You should focus on some political argument: economy, immigration, environment, health care, education, drugs, mental health, affirmative action, foreign policy, bullying. Keep in mind that this assignment hinges on you *wanting* something. Be clear about exactly what you want, and tell us why it makes sense that we want it too.

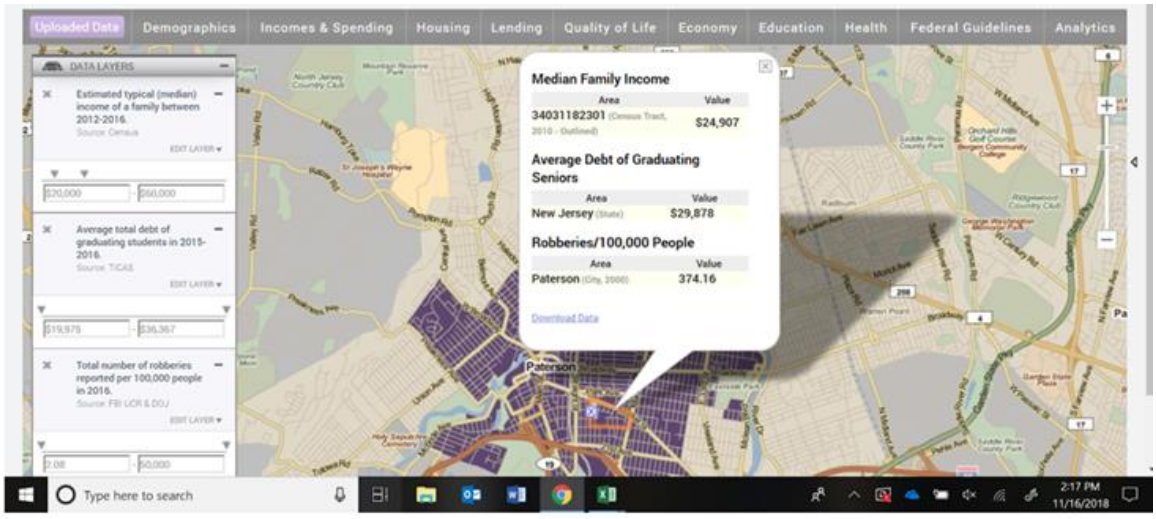
•As part of your final draft, include your own data visualization created through Policy Map or any of the other tools on the Seton Hall Library Website.

ASSIGNMENT OUTCOME

Policy Map creates an environment where students are forced to ask three connected questions involving some social justice concern. The very nature of the tool forces them to think recursively, asking different questions or refining questions based on the results of their data

stacking. A surprise outcome was the tool forces students to do the very sophisticated work of defining their parameters. For example, if they wanted to see if environmental issues disproportionately impact low income communities, they had to define what low income is based on other research around median income nationwide and at the state level. Another surprise outcome was student engagement in building a cohesive and smooth narrative that uses images and text. This was an outcome from the beginning but only rhetorically. The surprise was how students understood and found challenging the space of the page.

OUTCOME EXAMPLES



Or: https://shu-policymap-com.ezproxy.shu.edu/analytics

Colleges are gradually getting more expensive with timeby the year. The majority of New Jersey seniors have college debt exceeding over 30,000 dollars. Some can afford it, but unfortunately, residents in citiestowns like Paterson cannot, it doesn't seem fair to be punished by debt. It is

This is a great example of how the quality of writing might not be perfect but the student is asking and engaging with lines of inquiry they may otherwise never have developed.

Courtesy of PolicyMaps

However, it became necessary to further shrink the range in order to garner the most effective, concrete results. Consequently, the lower parameter of $75,000 was derived after taking into account the potential conditions of the houses. Rather than assuming an extremely miniscule lower parameter, such as the previous limit of $50,000, would provide a house that is functioning and in conditions to pass state inspections, it was a safe assumption that an additional $25,000 would allow the potential house seekers to explore low-class homes that have a slightly higher standard of living while accounting for some repair costs. Finally, the $80,000 high limit ensured that the results being populated were still classified as low-income households instead of middle-class houses that need "a little bit of

Courtesy of PolicyMaps

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

The following are student responses to the data visualization tool in our course evaluations (no direct question about the data tools was asked).

Positive:

• "Learning about visualization was very interesting to me. I never had to use visuals in my writing, which of course made it very difficult to do so in this class, but the challenge was worth it. More and more articles are using visuals these days and learning about it this year will make it easier for me to understand and even more observe the use of visuals in writings."

• “Essays could be very difficult to write especially if one does not know which type of writing to do. It has been a while since I've taken an English course, but I thought reviewing the different types of essays were both useful and important. Like the visualization, writing the different types of essays was a challenge, but nonetheless, it was a good challenge.”

Negative:

• “All the papers were back to back, but the papers weren't difficult, the time we had for all of them made things difficult. Data visualization coming in so early.”

• “The most difficult to learn for me was applying visualization in my writing.”

CONCLUSION

This project yielded encouraging results. The incorporation of digital tools into the writing course in no way pulled from a focus on writing but rather brought students into more profound conversation with their roles as writers, researchers and thinkers. Students had a more defined understanding of the writing process and had opportunities to write meta-cognitively about sophisticated rhetorical moves.

Looking forward, I’ve since adapted the assignment for my Business Writing class and plan to spend much more time teaching students in those courses some industry specific formats, style and best practice. I’ve sourced rubrics and best practices from open source tech education platforms to best prepare our students with humanities skills most desired in professional settings. I will paste the assignment below.

Data Analysis for Business Writing Pre-writing and Draft

Write one paragraph explaining the project.

- **This should include:** An introduction to the project. A handful of research questions and a hypothesis.

Write one paragraph explaining the logic behind the process.

- What steps did you take to pose your questions through the Policy Maps software? Keep track of changes made and parameters tweaked and defined.

Write as much as you'd like actually interacting with and explaining your visualizations. Your visualizations should be in the actual document and arranged logically to promote a balance between visual and rhetorical story telling.

Conclude and discuss findings and constraints.

- Give proper detail to the limitations of your information and why it is crucial the audience understand that this small visualization is not necessarily enough to take action or make decisions.